



FDA WANTS TO ELIMINATE LABELING OF IRRADIATED FOODS

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has begun soliciting public comment about whether they should remove all current labeling requirements for irradiated food.

Currently, the FDA requires that retail packages or displays of irradiated food include both the logo for irradiation (radura symbol) and a statement like "treated by irradiation," and that such notices be prominently displayed. The FDA is asking whether current irradiation labeling requirements be revised and less conspicuously displayed, or consider such alternative terms as "cold pasteurization" and "electronic pasteurization," instead of irradiation; and whether such labeling requirements should expire at a specified date in the future.

TAKE ACTION!

DEADLINE: Written comments must be submitted by May 18, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Submit written comments and supporting material to the Docket number: #98N-1038, Dockets Management Branch (HFA-305), Food and Drug Administration, 5630 Fishers Lane, Rm. 1061, Rockville, MD 20852. Email at: FDADockets@oc.fda.gov. If emailing comments put the Docket number in the subject line.

FACTS ABOUT IRRADIATION

In the food irradiation process, food is exposed to gamma radiation (ionizing radiation) where the food is passed through a chamber containing radioactive cobalt-60 (or cesium 137), electron beams or X-rays that bombard the food and kill bacteria, insects and mold.

Irradiation also destroys vitamins. Even at low doses, some irradiated foods lose 20% of vitamins such as C, E, K, and B complex. Because irradiation breaks down cell walls, irradiated foods which are stored for long periods may lose 70-80% of their vitamin content.

And it is unclear what effect eating irradiated food will have on humans. Studies on animals fed irradiated foods have shown increased tumors, reproductive failures and kidney damage. Chromosomal abnormalities occurred in children from India who were fed irradiated wheat.

Despite irradiation's hazards and drawbacks, it is being aggressively pushed by an embattled meat industry looking for cover in the wake of numerous recent food-borne illness outbreaks, particularly E coli and listeria. At the same time, the industry has vigorously opposed efforts to clean up filthy slaughter houses, slow down meat production processing lines, stop the feeding of antibiotics and rendered animal protein to livestock, and increase the number of federal meat inspectors - all more productive measures to reduce food borne-illnesses.

CONSUMER RIGHT TO KNOW

Without labeling of irradiated food there will be no way for consumers to know that food has been irradiated.

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